



Cashing In: The Political Economy of Constitutional Stability

This project addresses issues of law and the institutional management of violent inter-group conflict.

Many argue that secure constitutional rules are a key mechanism for managing political conflict and ensuring a peaceful transition from authoritarian rule, but we have few empirical studies of the determinants of constitutional change. This project begins to fill this gap by exploring the dynamics of presidential power in 20 postcommunist countries over the last decade. It asks: why have some presidents in the region expanded their powers dramatically, while others have not? Presidents in postcommunist countries who came to power in competitive elections increased their formal powers nine times between 1989 and 1998, with 6 of these 9 cases involving violence.

Initial quantitative results using annual data from 1989-1998 suggest that the greater the increase in income inequality, the more likely an expansion of presidential power. The effects of concentrated wealth on expansions of presidential power are, however, dependent upon the intensity of threats to the gains of the winners and upon the quality of democracy. This finding suggests the importance of understanding the interaction of political and economic factors on constitutional stability and a non-violent transition from authoritarian rule.

Principal Investigator:

[Timothy Frye](#), Professor, Political Science